04/04/24 • BIG CHEMICAL › NEWS

Plastic People: New Documentaries Expose 'Horror Movie' Reality of Plastic Pollution

Two new documentaries, "We're All Plastic People Now" and "Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics," expose the ubiquitous presence of plastic pollution in the environment and its potential risks to human health, particularly for developing fetuses and infants exposed to microplastics in the womb and through breast milk.

By John-Michael Dumais

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Two recent groundbreaking documentaries — "We're All Plastic People Now" and "Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics" — expose the pervasive presence of plastic pollution in the environment and how it might affect human health.

The films, featured at the Santa Fe Film Festival and SXSW respectively, include expert interviews, personal stories and scientific research to underscore the urgency of the plastic pollution crisis.

Rory Fielding, director of the Emmy Award-winning "We're All Plastic People Now," tested four generations of his own family's blood for plastic-derived chemicals.

"Plastic People" co-director Ziya Tong investigated the hidden world of microplastics and their effects on the human body.

Variety called "Plastic People" "one of those essential state-of-our-world documentaries" that offers "a fascinating history of plastic, showing us how the stuff gradually took over" — but also described it as a "horror movie [that] could have been called 'Attack of the Killer Polymers.'"

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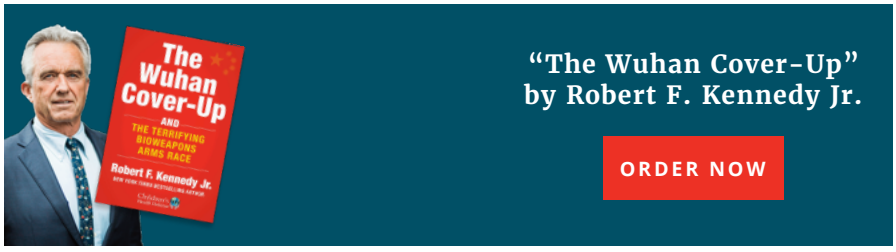

'Plastic is the end of the future'

Plastic pollution has become ubiquitous, with plastic particles found in every corner of the globe.

"It's in the air. It's in the water. It's in the food. It's in all of our bodies," according to Rolf Halden, Ph.D., an environmental engineer from Arizona State University, who appears in "We're All Plastic People Now."

The documentary reveals the discovery of microplastics in human placentas, as reported by Italian researcher Dr. Antonio Ragusa, who warned, "For humanity, plastic is the end of the future."

Similarly, "Plastic People" explores the hidden world of microplastics, tiny particles that researchers have found in human organs, blood and brain tissue.

The film's synopsis notes that "almost every bit of plastic ever made breaks down into 'microplastics'" which become "a permanent part of the environment."

A featured expert in the film, Rick Smith, Ph.D., co-author of "Slow Death By Rubber Duck: The Secret Danger of Everyday Things," said, "It turns out that plastic is actually inside of us. It's in our kids."

Tong, a science journalist, tested snow in her backyard and found plastic fragments, prompting her to tell her children not to catch snowflakes.

According to "Plastic People," plastic is like "the embodiment of capitalism. It made possible the material world that we live in now. They are the bones, the skin, the connective tissue."

Plastics-derived chemicals can 'make things go awry in the human body'

Both documentaries delve into the health risks associated with exposure to plastic-derived chemicals.

In "We're All Plastic People Now," Dr. Leonardo Trasande, a pediatrician and director of the New York University Division of Environmental Pediatrics, discussed the impact of endocrine-disrupting chemicals found in plastics, which "hack those molecular signals and make things go awry in the human body."

The film also features the story of Jess Helsley, director of Watershed Restoration for the Wild Salmon Center, who was diagnosed with early-onset colon cancer in her thirties. Helsley participated in a study that found microplastics in the colons of young cancer patients.

"Plastic People" explores the link between plasticizers and various health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer and fertility issues. The film highlights the work of leading scientists "finding these particles in our bodies: organs, blood, brain tissue, and even the placentas of new mothers."

The documentary features an interview with Dr. Pete Myers, chief scientist, founder and board chair of Environmental Health Sciences, who warns, "Plastics can contribute to healthcare in some miraculous ways, but plastics also can cause health problems, pretty severe health problems like death."

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Infertility, lower testosterone levels and risks to babies

"We're All Plastic People Now" explores the impact of plastic-derived chemicals on fertility and testosterone levels.

Shanna Swan, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health at Mount Sinai Hospital, discussed "phthalate syndrome," which describes how male genitals are altered by maternal exposure to phthalates, a common class of plasticizers.

Swan explained that phthalates lower testosterone levels, leading to "incompletely masculinized" males with "less-descended testicles, a smaller penis [and] shorter anogenital distance."

The effects of phthalates are not limited to males. Swan said that in females, "If testosterone gets in … when it shouldn't, or more than should be there, then the female starts producing more male-like genitals."

This leads to a "decreasing of sex differences," where "the male becomes less completely a male, the female is less completely a female," Swan said.

"We're All Plastic People Now" also reveals the presence of microplastics in human breast milk, with Ragusa's study being the first to demonstrate this phenomenon.

Stacey Colino, co-author of "Count Down: How Our Modern World Is Threatening Sperm Counts, Altering Male and Female Reproductive Development, and Imperiling the Future of the Human Race," shared her personal experience of using plastic breast pump attachments and bottles, all of which likely exposed her children to plastic-derived chemicals.

John Hocevar, director of Greenpeace's oceans campaign, warned that plastic is becoming a part of us "from the very beginning of our lives."

"When you heat up milk in a plastic bottle, some of the bits of plastic from that bottle are going into the milk that the baby is drinking," he said.

Oil and gas companies motivated to 'increase the plasticization of human life'

Both documentaries shed light on the role of major corporations, particularly in the oil and gas industry, in perpetuating the plastic pollution crisis.

"Plastic People" provides a historical overview of the plastics revolution that ramped up significantly after World War II with shoes, fabrics, appliances, furniture and cars before leading to today's single-use era of disposable water bottles, cups, lighters and plastic bags.

Hocevar, in "We're All Plastic People Now," explained that "99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels, oil and gas. It's a danger to human health every step of the way throughout its entire life cycle."

The documentary also features the story of Sharon Lavigne, founder of RISE St. James in Louisiana, who successfully fought against the construction of the world's largest plastics plant in her community, part of an area known as "Cancer Alley" due to the high concentration of industries and chemical facilities.

Christy Leavitt, Oceana's U.S. Plastics Campaign director, highlighted the industry's plans to expand plastic production. "They want to … triple the amount" of plastics by 2060, she said.

Ragusa called out specific companies, including Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Nestlé for their longtime use of plastics.

Smith, in “Plastic People,” said that facing a world that uses less fossil fuel, oil companies are seeking ways to sustain their profits and therefore have every motivation to “increase the plasticization of human life.”

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‘Every water bottle is a time bomb’

Both documentaries highlight the shortcomings of current recycling efforts in addressing the plastic pollution crisis.

Halden explained that recycling is not a viable solution due to the low recycling rates and the challenges of recycling plastics.

“Every water bottle is a time bomb,” Halden said, noting that only a small fraction of plastics actually make it to recycling centers, and even then, the recycling process is often ineffective.

“[Recycling] doesn’t make business sense right now the way we incentivize the use of fossil fuels to make cheap plastics,” he said.

Leavitt emphasized the need for a shift toward refillable and reusable systems. “Recycling isn’t going to be enough, so some people are turning to that as a solution but it’s not going to be enough to solve plastics.”

‘We need to crank up the level of urgency’

Both documentaries underscore the importance of individual actions, government policies and corporate accountability to address the plastic pollution crisis.

In “Plastic People,” Smith said, “In order to solve [the plastics] problem, we need to crank up the level of urgency on this issue.”

The film featured a resident of Bayfield in Ontario, Canada, claiming to be the first “plastic-free community” in North America.

Experts and activists in “We’re All Plastic People Now” stressed the importance of reducing plastic consumption at the individual level.

Ruth Fielding, the 93-year-old mother of the film’s producer, said, “Every little bit helps. If I don’t take a plastic bag when I go to the grocery store, it helps a little. [But] I’m only one person … I can’t save the world all by myself.”

Leavitt highlighted the necessity for a change in government policies. She said we need national, state and local governments to “require companies to change the way that single-use plastics are produced and used.”

Ragusa also called for political action. “In order to change this, we need politicians that will be able to change.”

“Plastic People” similarly calls for a multi-faceted approach to tackling the plastic pollution problem, with an impact campaign that aims to “execute a solution-based program that will include a number of events, education materials, as well as calls to action.”

The film’s website features a “Take Action” page including several petitions and other resources to help people raise awareness, get involved and make a difference in their communities.

On its Facebook page, “Plastic People” posted an article about “a historic worldwide plastics treaty” being discussed by the U.N. Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution, whose next session takes place in

Ottawa from April 23-29.

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John-Michael Dumais

John-Michael Dumais is a news editor for The Defender. He has been a writer and community organizer on a variety of issues, including the death penalty, war, health freedom and all things related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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BChristine
13 days ago

Genetically-engineered children/people and now plastic people ... that about sums it up. I can see this in many people emotionally, mentally, and even physically now. It's very sad what humanity has morphed into over the decades.

5 0 Reply

Ricky Ricardo → BChristine
12 days ago

In the past year, I've been seeing many people having problems with their thought processes. It's as if their mind is slowly dissolving.

3 0 Reply

BChristine → Ricky Ricardo
12 days ago

Yes, exactly ... zombie-like too.

2 0 Reply

Ricky Ricardo
12 days ago

I've been saying for many years that we are being poisoned from every direction. It's amazing that humanity has survived for this long! As long as people are getting richer and richer off of destroying the lives of fellow humans (and the planet itself); the evils of this world will continue.
In the 70's, we used to joke about "Plastic People" (meaning FAKE)...little did we know that the label would become literal!

3 0 Reply

Lou Testla
13 days ago

One other thing about tire dust is the math is too obvious for the big rubber companies to claim ignorance. Weight of tire lost over its expected life times how ever many trillions of tires. And they obviously had to know it was being aerosolized because it is not sitting in piles by the roadsides.

2 0 Reply

Lou Testla → Lou Testla
12 days ago

My previous comment was an add on to my previous to that comment which for some reason was removed. What I said was: that it might be interesting that these 2 docs are coming out at the same time as the news that 78% of the microplastics in the ocean is tire dust (that would indicate it is also the vast majority of microplastics (in the soil and humans). These 2 documentaries seem as usual to blame the consumer (although I haven't watched them entirely) and not be very actionable. Tire dust on the other hand leaves a fingerprint and would be very actionable as the tire companies have had to know for decades that this was going on.

0 0 Reply

John Stone Mod → Lou Testla
12 days ago

Hi Lou

We have one previous comment from you but can't see anything which has been removed in te deetons.

0 0 Reply

Ricky Ricardo → Lou Testla
12 days ago

Whenever I see the idiots outside with their "leaf blowers" (especially on a windy day!) blowing all of the particulate matter from the ground, into the air, I become very angry and do my best to avoid the area. The problem is; all of those particles are already in the air and the wind is spreading it everywhere.

0 0 Reply

BarbaraCharis
13 days ago

"Better Living through Chemisry! " This was its slogan years ago. Chemistry is about to destroy the planet. It would nice to get back our pre-plastic world and forego all the 100,000 plus chemicals scientists have created.

2 0 Reply

lanainutahdesert
13 days ago

Micro-plastics are part of the mix of geoengineering substances (along with aluminum, strontium, bacteria, viruses, and other dangerous toxins) used in Solar Radiation Mitigation (SRM) programs. You and your children are consuming them every day.

3 1 Reply

Ricky Ricardo → lanainutahdesert
12 days ago

Even worse; they are nano particles and we're breathing them into our lungs. Trees are dying, everywhere. People would see this if they simply paid attention to the environment. They're dying due to the amount of aluminum in the soil and they are no longer able to uptake the nutrients they need from the soil. Humanity is facing an existential threat. I won't elaborate, because I've said it all before. Either people understand what's going on, or they don't.

2 0 Reply

the saint
12 days ago

Did they mention the micro plastics raining down from Stratospheric Aerosol Injection? Stop Geoengineering now! geoengineeringwatch.org

1 0 Reply

brbg → the saint
11 days ago

They have been spraying aluminum particles to deflect the sun, as if that would have any good effect on God's creation. Aluminum is a neuro-toxin.!!

0 0 Reply

Voyt Regnal
13 days ago

Growing population requires more plastic products. Many methods of recycling plastic exist. It is up to authorities to start using them. But it is NOT HAPPENING ! Ask youtself WHY ? Here is an example @EdenEnergyX: https://twitter.com/EdenEne...
..thermal process called the Eden Energy Process can process all carbon-based waste into clean-burning, carbon-neutral fuels and organic fertilizers, simultaneously in a wet and mixed stream, in a highly energy-efficient (over 85%), and environmentally positive way, with no waste streams or byproducts.

Although not technically "recycling" it creates highly valuable energy products, from a source that is currently plaguing our world.

Otherwise this column represents example of paranoia and alarmism related to mam made climate change/attack on fossil fuels/CO2 effect.

1 0 Reply

R **Ricky Ricardo** → Voyt Regnal
12 days ago

Why? Here's your answer: GREED -$$$.

1 0 Reply

Wendy Allen
6 days ago

Sea salt maybe 80% plastic. Can the plastic get out of the kidneys?

0 0 Reply

Gary Brown
12 days ago

Here is a great solution since plastic is not recyclable and China is refusing the world's shipments.

March 2, 2021 Could plastic roads make for a smoother ride?

From lower carbon emissions to fewer potholes, there are a number of benefits to building a layer of plastic into roads.

https://www.bbc.com/future/...

Jul 14, 2021 PlasticRoad - Solution to the plastic waste problem

Prefabricated, modular, hollow road structure created using recycled plastic.

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